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I am honored to testify before this US House of Representatives' Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee on veteran healthcare in the Rio Grande Valley. I have been associated with the Department of Veterans Affairs as a healthcare provider since 1981. It has been my goal to provide veterans with the best healthcare that the system can provide. We have a team of VA healthcare professionals in the Valley that are providing daily healthcare delivery to a veteran population that has proudly served their country in the Armed Forces.

The VA clinic in McAllen, Texas was established in 1972 as an outpatient facility and housed in a trailer located near the now demolished and relocated McAllen Methodist Hospital. Originally, the clinic was under the director of the San Antonio Outpatient Clinic. In June 1977, the outpatient clinics were merged and became satellite facilities of the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Veteran's Hospital under the auspices of the hospital director. In 1978, the clinic relocated from the trailer to a structure of 5000 square feet. In August 1991, the clinic relocated to its present facility of 27, 000 square feet. This facility is located 250 miles from the parent facility in San Antonio, Texas. The McAllen Clinic serves seven counties in South Texas: Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, Brooks, Jim Hogg, Kennedy and Willacy. The catchment area is comprised of approximately 47,000 veterans, of which the market share is 23%. This figure does not include the large number of winter visitors that significantly swells the veteran population in the Valley.

Services provided at the clinic include: medical and psychiatric treatment; mental hygiene classes; Registry examinations (Agent Orange, ionizing radiation exposure, Gulf War Service); and other examinations (e.g. former POWs, Aid and Attendance and Housebound). Additionally, special clinics include flexible sigmoidoscopy, geriatric assessment, gynecology, minor ambulatory surgery, endocrinology and podiatry. Other services in the clinic are psychological evaluation and testing, pharmacy, physical therapy, laboratory, radiology, social service, smoking cessation, marital counseling and dietary therapy. Furthermore, the clinic participates with the South Texas Family Practice Residency in McAllen and the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio in teaching 20 family practice residents ambulatory internal medicine, geriatric medicine, flexible sigmoidoscopy and minor surgery. There are four

board certified family practice physicians of which one is certified in geriatric medicine, three board certified internal medicine physicians of which two have subspecialties in pulmonology, endocrinology, and geriatric medicine and a psychiatrist and psychologist assigned to mental health. Five of the seven have faculty appointments as clinical assistant professors to the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The clinic received accreditation through the Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations from 2002 to 2005. There are 6 primary care teams delivering primary care and one mental health team composed of a psychiatrist, psychologist, mental health nurse and social worker. The Lower Rio Grande Valley Surgical contract has provided day surgery on a local basis for Valley veterans for the past 5 years.

There are 24 Iraqi-Afghanistan war veterans who have enrolled in the McAllen VA outpatient clinic of which 4 were female veterans. Ten veterans declined treatment but wanted their enrollment documented in the system. Initial screening for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Infectious Diseases, Depression and Alcohol Abuse is offered to all these veterans.

The Harlingen VA Outpatient Clinic will be operational as early as July 2004 and will start initially with two primary care teams that will eventually expand to 8 teams by 2006. This expansion of primary care delivery to the veteran population will decompress the McAllen VA Outpatient Clinic, which is operating at full capacity, and accommodate the continued growth of the veteran demand for medical services in the Rio Grande Valley. The Harlingen VA Outpatient Clinic will be situated in the Regional Academic Health Center affiliated with the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and will have 30,000 square feet of clinic space. The facility will mirror the clinic in McAllen with the exception of providing additional services such as optometry and dental care.

The Veterans Health Initiative Independent Study Courses provided by VA for healthcare personnel has been a substantial help in the recognition of medical problems unique to the veteran population. Examples of these courses include: Endemic Infectious Diseases of Southwest Asia; Caring for War Wounded; Preservation-Amputation Care; and Treatment and Traumatic Brain Injury. There are a total of 15 on-line courses that are available to healthcare personnel that encompass other aspects of VA medicine. I have found these to be excellent resources and have encouraged the medical staff in McAllen to participate in these on-line courses.

My family has served proudly in the U.S. Armed Forces. My father Eulalio Aguilar Sr. served in the Army during World War II, my brother Eulalio Aguilar Jr. served two tours in Vietnam as a Marine receiving a bronze star and two purple hearts; and, my older brother Alfredo B. Aguilar who served in the Air Force as a medic. I have been in the US Air Force Reserve for 15 years, and it has been a privilege serving with the other men and women serving in all branches of the Armed Services. Thank you for your attention.